

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2397

INFO AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PDEV, PINT, UK

SUBJECT: GRIMSBY BY-ELECTION

1. THE WRIT TO HOLD THE GRIMSBY BY-ELECTION WAS ISSUED IN THE COMMONS YESTERDAY, WITH THE BALLOTING SCHEDULED FOR APRIL 28. GRIMSBY IS THE SEAT HELD BY THE LATE ANTHONY CROSLAND, WHO WON WITH A 7000-VOTE MAJORITY IN THE OCTOBER 1974 GENERAL ELECTION. THE TORIES, WHO ENJOYED A 17.5 PERCENT SWING IN VOTES FROM LABOR AT STECHFORD, NEED ONLY A SWING OF 7.7 PERCENT TO CAPTURE GRIMSBY.

2. THE CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATE, ROBERT BLAIR, IS A FISHING SUPPLIES BUYER FOR BIRDS EYE FOODS AND A LONG-TIME RESIDENT OF THE CONSTITUENCY. HE PLANS TO CENTER HIS CAMPAIGN ON THE PLIGHT OF THE FISHING INDUSTRY, A PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE LOCAL ISSUE IN THIS SEASIDE TOWN WHERE ONE PERSON IN FIVE DEPENDS ON THE INDUSTRY FOR HIS LIVELIHOOD. BLAIR INTENDS TO CAPITALIZE ON GRIMSBY'S RELATIVELY HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT RATE OF 7.5 PERCENT (C.F. 5.5 PERCENT NATIONALLY), AND THE SHARP IN-

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CREASES IN THE COST OF LIVING WHICH SO CONCERNED THE ELECTORATE AT STECHFORD.

3. THE LABOR CANDIDATE IS AUSTIN MITCHELL, A TELEVISION LINKMAN WITH YORKSHIRE TELEVISION UNTIL THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF HIS CANDIDACY. MITCHELL HOPES TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE WELL-ORGANIZED LOCAL LABOR MACHINE

WHICH HAD EFFECTIVELY MOBILIZED SUPPORT FOR CROSLAND,
AND IS MUCH HEALTHIER THAN THE LABOR MACHINE IN
STECHFORD.

4. CITY COUNCIL MEMBER ANDREW DE FRIETAS IS THE LIBERAL
CANDIDATE, AND HE HAS BEEN CAMPAIGNING LONGER AND HARDER
THAN HIS OPPONENTS. A WELL-KNOWN RESIDENT OF THE COM-
MUNITY, DE FRIETAS HOPES TO REVERSE THE DRAMATIC DECLINE
OF HIS PARTY EVIDENT AT STECHFORD. THE LIBERALS HAVE
BEEN STRONGER IN GRIMSBY THAN IN STECHFORD IN THE PAST
(14.6 PERCENT VS. 20.6 PERCENT, RESPECTIVELY, IN THE
OCTOBER 1974 ELECTION).

5. COMMENT: WHILE PERHAPS NOT WORTHY OF AS DETAILED
SCRUTINY AS THE BY-ELECTION AT STECHFORD, THE CONTEST
AT GRIMSBY WILL PROVIDE A FURTHER INDICATION OF THE
GOVERNMENT'S POPULARITY WITH THE VOTING PUBLIC. PO-
LITICAL OBSERVERS AND BOOKMAKERS ALIKE PREDICT A TORY
VICTORY, BUT THE SWING IN VOTES WILL OFFER SOME IDEA
OF THE CONSERVATIVES' ABILITY TO SUSTAIN MOMENTUM AFTER
STECHFORD. A SIGNIFICANT LOSS OF SUPPORT FOR THE
LIBERALS, IN A CONTEST WHERE THEY HAVE AN AGGRESSIVE
AND POPULAR CANDIDATE AND IN A CONSTITUENCY WHERE THEY
HAVE ENJOYED A MEASURE OF STRENGTH IN THE PAST, WOULD BE
DAMAGING TO THEIR CAUSE AND WOULD BE VIEWED AS A
FURTHER REPUDIATION OF THEIR COMPACT WITH THE GOVERN-
MENT. LIKE THE TOWN'S FISHERMEN WHO HAVE BEEN WORKING
THE COLD ICELANDIC WATERS FOR DECADES, THE GOVERNMENT
AND ITS LIBERAL ALLIES MAY END UP WITH A GREATLY RE-
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DUCED CATCH IN THE WATERS OF THE HUMBERSIDE.

MILLER

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Message Attributes

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